

will be important to prioritize which drugs to which people. Mother-to-child drugs that are especially effective in keeping children from getting AIDS at all would be very, very important. But, beyond that, we have got to tailor strategies for combating AIDS to the environment in which those strategies are expected to work.

In Africa, we greet the decision of the drug companies to offer drugs at discount rates. At the same time, we must remind ourselves that most of our effort must go into preventing AIDS, which has already become a catastrophe of epidemic proportions in southern Africa.

CONDEMNING DESTRUCTION OF BUDDHAS IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ENGLISH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ENGLISH. Mr. Speaker, all too often we in Washington are insulated from major events that are going on around the world, events that directly or indirectly impact us. But there are few events more grotesque than something that happened just over the last couple of weeks in Afghanistan, an act of barbarism, an act of mindless iconoclasm by a regime noted for its intolerance of all values that do not precisely conform to their own. Here I am referring to the decision of the Taliban outlaw government in Afghanistan to sanction and encourage the destruction of two standing Buddhas of enormous importance to world culture.

The Bamiyan standing Buddha statues in Afghanistan up until this point have been one of the greatest wonders of the world and one of the marvels of that region and one of the remaining gifts that the cultures of that part of central Asia had given the entire world. They were a magnificent example of human artistry and skill.

Mr. Speaker, those statues had represented a common heritage of all mankind. The Bamiyan Buddhas had survived hostile onslaughts over the centuries, but they did not survive destruction at the hands of religious zealots and heretics.

Afghanistan is a country with a very rich and enormously complicated history. Because of its mountainous terrain, it was often on the border of different empires that washed across the history of the world. It was briefly a Greek region under Alexander the Great, and it was also a Buddhist region in the third century B.C., Buddhism having been launched there by the Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan empire.

At that time, Afghanistan lay at the heart of the silk route, which was a source of trade that moved from east to west.

Accompanying the caravans of precious goods, Buddhist monks came and went, teaching their religion along the route. From this very part of the world

Buddhism established itself over the centuries in China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Mongolia.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, a new art form emerged, the art of Gandhara, the ancient name for part of Afghanistan. During this period, the earliest Buddhist images in human form evolved in this Kushan/Saka area.

The caravans on the silk route often stopped in the Bamiyan Valley. It was one of the major Buddhist centers from the second century up to the time that Islam entered the Valley in the ninth century.

There these two giant Buddhas, one of them the largest standing image of Buddha in the world, more than 120 feet high, stood, until this week. These symbols of their ancient faith were cut out of the rock sometime between the third and fifth centuries A.D. The smaller statue of Buddha was carved during Kanishka the Great's reign. It was estimated that two centuries later the large Buddha statue was carved.

I have to tell you, it is striking to me as an archaeology buff that both of these statues were dressed in togas of the Greek style imported into India by the soldiers of Alexander the Great when he invaded the region between 334 and 327 B.C.

The features of these statues of Buddha had disappeared. During the centuries, undoubtedly, there had been earlier bouts of iconoclasm. The idea behind the destruction was to take away the soul of the hated image by obliterating, or at least deforming, the head and hands.

The intolerance of the Taliban in leading to this destruction needs to have a strong international response. The Taliban has clearly failed to recognize the value of any art that does not conform precisely to their religious purposes. The Taliban are only the temporary holders. Their government is only a custodian of this area. We cannot tolerate their willful destruction of international treasures that are really holdings of the entire world. We cannot allow them to get away with this action.

The action of the Taliban regime represents the worst case of vandalism in recent history of our ancient past. Today, more and more people are awakening to their heritage and the importance of preserving these sorts of relics. We have in Christian countries many examples of Islamic art that are protected, like the Alhambra in Spain. We know that in Egypt, now an Islamic country, there are relics, there are statues, there are temples that are of enormous significance to the culture of the world.

We need in Congress to send a clear message to the Taliban that this is unacceptable, and we need to bring together all of the nations of the world to express our outrage and take firm action against this cultural imperialism.

ELECTION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today to talk on a special order on election reform.

Today I am proud to introduce my first piece of legislation in the United States House of Representatives, a resolution calling on Congress to take swift and meaningful action on election reform so we can implement significant improvements before 2002. I am committed to making election reform a top priority and ensuring that America's faith in democracy is not diminished by pervasive problems in our voting system. We must enter the next Federal election cycle with full confidence in our Nation's voting technology. That is why I urge my colleagues on both side of the aisle to work together to ensure that in 2002 each and every vote counts.

Exactly 1 month ago, I addressed this House on this very same issue. At that time I spoke of my work as Rhode Island's Secretary of State in modernizing our State's antiquated voting equipment. During my tenure, Rhode Island upgraded its voting machines from the worst in the Nation to among the best. We improved our technology, we improved accessibility, we improved accuracy in our elections and achieved a significant increase in voter participation. Furthermore, all of these reforms were cost effective.

Models exist for accurate and cost-effective election reform that States can replicate to assure true democracy. In fact, my former staff has been working with election officials in Florida and New York as well as researchers at MIT to discuss how they can emulate our success.

Many of our Nation's election administrators right now are working tirelessly to improve their voting systems, and I applaud their efforts to ensure that no voter is disenfranchised and that all ballots are counted accurately. However, I know from personal experience that upgrading an entire State's election system is no small feat. It requires a great deal of planning, investment of time and resources, and the coordination of efforts with different levels of government.

Fortunately, 21 Members of this House have introduced legislation to help improve our Nation's overall voting system. The sponsors of these bills hold a variety of ideological views. However, we all share one common goal, to ensure that our Nation's election system does not undermine citizens' confidence in the democratic process and that every vote counts.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I am introducing this sense of the Congress resolution encouraging Congress to make this vision a reality by the 2002 election. Though we may disagree about some of the details, my colleagues and I are willing to put aside